RG 374 DEFENSE NUCLEAR AGENCY
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COMD

8 March 1954

MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD:

SUBJECT: Visit to Kwajalein, Friday, 5 March

1. Arrived Kwajalein 1000 hours and had an immediate conference with the following:

Rear Admiral Clarke, CO, Naval Station Kwajalein
Brig. General Estes, Commander, Task Group 7.4
Dr. Thomas White, Health Division, LASL
CDR L. E. Alford, USN, CO USS RENSHAW (DDE 499)
Members of Admiral Clarke's Staff
Local Representatives of Trust Territories

2. The following was determined:

a. The weather station detachment at Rongerik was evacuated by PBM on 2 March.

b. The DDE PHILLIPS entered the lagoon at Rongelap at daylight, 3 March, anchored near the village and evacuated at that place. The loading, of course, was easy compared with that at Utirik which took place on the lee side of the atoll over the reef in open sea.

c. The DDE RENSHAW evacuated the natives at Utirik at daylight, 4 March. The DDE was unable to enter the lagoon. Landing parties went ashore by motor whale boat and raft and were met by Trust Territory Representatives and interpreters who had arrived by seaplane from Kwajalein. All natives on Utirik were promptly evacuated to the destroyer where all but the old and feeble were given a bath. The children were scrubbed down first and thereafter the grown people entered the showers. The children apparently took great delight in playing around in the water.

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d. Aboard the RENSHAW the natives were fed fish and rice and ice cream and ate heartily. They were returned directly to Kwajalein where they were examined by medical people and quartered temporarily in a vacant barracks. They are to be moved to a native village where they will be quartered in tents furnished by JTF SEVEN. No sickness was observed, nor was any expected, due to the comparatively low radiological exposure of this group. However, it was reported that some small children, after arrival at Kwajalein, showed a loss of appetite. This is attributed by the medical officers to the change of diet and native food is being obtained from the nearby native settlement on the island next to Kwajalein Island.

CLASSIFICATION CANCELLED *
BY AUTHORITY OF DOE/OC
J. Diaz 8/28/90
* REVIEWED BY CTR DNA SWISHER DATE TO DOE ES-50, 5-14-90

NO DOE CLASS. INFO. COORDINATE
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3. On this trip to Kwajalein I took with me Dr. White of LASL and Major Crea from my staff who were to perform a water and soil sampling mission at a number of the atolls, all of which had shown very low or no contamination on aerial survey. It was determined that certain atolls were extremely hazardous for seaplane landings. Since no material fallout had been indicated on any of the atolls and time was not a factor, the following arrangements were made while at Kwajalein with Admiral Clarke. The RENSHAW, then at Kwajalein, was ordered by CJTF SEVEN to depart at noon with Major Crea from JTF SEVEN staff to visit Kikiep, Jamo, Ailuk and Mejit to obtain samples. Major Crea was ordered also to check a Trust Territory ship (AKL) with approximately 50 persons aboard which arrived Utirik 1000 M, Tuesday, and departed 0700 M, Wednesday, and is now probably at Ailuk. This ship proceeded to Utirik direct from Kwajalein and most probably received no significant fallout. Dr. White was ordered to depart at noon on 5 March (M) by seaplane and perform similar sampling at Wotje, Erikub and Maloelap. It is expected that previous surveys by airplane of insignificant fallout on these atolls will be confirmed.

4. It was determined that Admiral Clarke at Kwajalein has taken every measure possible to cooperate. He has accomplished the following:

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a. The previous night he and his staff warned all personnel at the movies and clubs that no news is to be allowed to leak out in regard to the fact that natives have been brought to Kwajalein from outlying atolls. It is certain that everyone on Kwajalein knows why these natives were brought in. All persons on Kwajalein saw the light in the sky and heard the explosion of the device. Soon afterward two destroyers arrived with the natives. One cannot hide two destroyers and some 250 natives at a place like Kwajalein.

b. Dungarees and other clothing were easily supplied to the male natives to replace clothing that had to be decontaminated. The matter of supplying clothing for the women and children was more difficult but the families at Kwajalein, when called upon, supplied more than was needed.

5. The natives are particularly interested in the following:

a. When they can get back to their home islands. They have been told that it would be in approximately two to four weeks. A final answer cannot be given until Rongelap and Utirik have been surveyed periodically over a period of time and it has been determined whether it is essential to keep them evacuated until the close of the operation.

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b. The natives are concerned about their animals left behind. These consist of chickens and pigs. These animals are fed almost entirely copra (dried coconut meat). The main problem is water because water is extremely scarce and kept under careful guard and none was left where it would be accessible to the animals. The cost of trying to supply food, but more especially water, by ship, seaplane or airdrop for these animals would be many times more expensive than the cost of replacement at a later date. CJTF SEVEN does not anticipate taking action to care for these animals.

e. The interpreter stated that some of the heads of families had left money underneath their huts. This is their only possession of any consequence. Care will be taken to insure that any re-entry parties do not disturb the natives' belongings.

6. I interviewed the magistrate from Utirik, a native. He said that early in the morning on the first of March, local time, he saw a very bright light in the sky and heard a bang followed by a rumble somewhat similar to thunder but since there were no storm clouds in the area he figured it was an explosion. He was on Jaluit during the war which was extensively bombed and he knows what an explosion is. He saw nothing come down from the sky like dust or debris. He said that he had never seen or heard in previous years anything like he had seen and heard on this occasion. He seemed in good spirits and with great delight discussed his reactions to the light and bang.

7. I interviewed the top native from Rongelap through an interpreter. His experience was similar except he obviously saw and heard more than was the case at Utirik. When I asked him if he felt anything, he reached out and gave me a push. He observed no fallout.

8. I interviewed Warrant Officer J. A. Katrol who is in charge of the weather station at Rongerik. He said that he was just washing up when the flash occured. He came out with a towel and the light was so bright that he held the towel just to the bottom edge of his eyes. He did not have to cover his eyes but was on the verge of doing so because of the exceptionally bright light in the sky. He said that about 15 minutes after the flash, the noise and shock arrived which were very noticeable and shook and rattled the buildings. He became very frightened later when he saw the high reading on his instruments. Katrol reported that he did not see particles falling as had been reported but a haze closed in like a cloud and a dust was deposited on buildings and flat surfaces.

9. When asked for an explanation as to why the film badges previously reported to have been in the icebox had such a high reading on them, he explained that the man who took them out of the icebox carried them in his pocket for a period of time.

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9. Captain Naight of the Division of Military Application, AEC, who was sent by me to Kwajalein, reported in effect as follows. Health situation of the natives is satisfactory and physical examinations are within normal expected variations. There were no symptoms of radiation sickness as of 5 March. Some infants seemed to be difficult to feed but this is thought to be due to present variations from their usual diet. Procurement of their usual diet is being accomplished from natives who live on an island adjacent to Kwajalein Island. Present prognosis is favorable and morale seems to be very good.

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10. I discussed the problem with the senior naval medical officer at Kwajalein Naval Station who reported he had found no illness that could be attributed to radiation, although he is no expert in this field.

11. Admiral Clarke, the local Trust Territoty Representative and members of Admiral Clarke's staff feel that it is out of the question to keep news of this event from leaking out. There are some 200 families at Kwajalein. There is no mail censorship. There is constant traffic on MATS through Kwajalein of transient personnel. I saw some 20 or more persons, mostly sailors, boarding a MATS aircraft bound for Hawaii. It is inevitable that many Trust Territory people must be consulted and involved in evacuating and caring for these natives.

12. I assured Admiral Clarke and the Trust Territory Representative that the Joint Task Force would stand any expenses from Task Force funds over and above normal Naval or Trust Territory expenses. This would include rations, pay of interpreters, and the like. The Joint Task Force has already shipped ~~25 or~~ 35 squad tents from JTF stocks to house the natives. I have had in mind that any natives who were stricken with radiation sickness should be air evacuated to Tripler Hospital. When questioned on this subject, the medical people anticipated there probably would be none with the one slight possibility of some of the yound children having to be air evacuated to Tripler.

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P. W. CLARKSON
Major General, USA
Commander

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